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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003165

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SUBJECT: POPULAR KARBALA ISF COMMANDER SURVIVES OUSTER
ATTEMPT

REF: BAGHDAD 2967

Classified By: Karbala PRT Leader Don Cooke for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

(U) This is a PRT Karbala Reporting Cable

11. (C) Summary: Karbala ISF commander MG Ra'ad Shaker Jawdat al-Hasnawi's reassignment as security chief in Diyala Province was rescinded. In response to Provincial Council pressure, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki reversed an earlier decision to transfer Ra'ad. Ra'ad is credited with ushering in stability by breaking the back of the Shi'a militias. The ISF commander's growing popularity, in spite of his heavy handed tactics, was resented by political rivals, particularly Da'wa Party rival Governor Aqeel Mahmoud al-Khazali. The failed attempt to remove Ra'ad is a blow to Governor Aqeel and may have embarrassed PM Maliki. End Summary.

Transfer order

12. (SBU) On September 21, according to police contacts, Karbala ISF commander MG Ra'ad Shaker Jawdat al-Hasnawi was assigned to serve as chief of the Iraqi Police (IP) in Diyala Province. On September 23, Karbala radio, quoting an unnamed official source, reported that Ra'ad's transfer came at the personal request of PM Maliki. Other PRT contacts claim the transfer order was initiated by Karbala Province Governor Aqeel Mahmoud al-Khazali. Abd al-Mahdi al-Karbala'i, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's deputy, allegedly raised the issue with Maliki during the PM's visit to Karbala.

Public Outcry and Order Rescinded

13. (SBU) A source close to senior police officials said 120-150 people protested in Karbala demanding Maliki reverse his decision to transfer Ra'ad to Diyala. Protesters carried banners stating "We Want Ra'ad and No One Else" and "We Have Witnessed Great Stability Under Ra'ad's Leadership." The Provincial Council (PC) also expressed its support for Ra'ad. Deputy Chairman Hamid al-Turfi announced that the PC would ask Iraqi military leadership to delay implementation of the order for security's sake. PM Maliki reportedly suspended Ra'ad's transfer to Diyala Province.

Not Everyone Satisfied

14. (C) Ra'ad's tenure as ISF Commander in Karbala since April 2007 saw a dramatic improvement in security. Ra'ad and his deputy, Major Ali Hamid Hashim, have a reputation for dealing quickly and severely with miscreants. The August 2007 violence, that marred last year's Shabaniyah observances, gave Ra'ad and Ali the pretext to go hammer-and-tongs after the Shi'a militias. Hundreds of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and Badr Corps suspects were detained, run out of town or went into hiding. Ra'ad reveled in his growing popularity and missed few opportunities to sing his own praises.

15. (C) Karbala's civilian leaders regard Ra'ad with a mixture of fear, envy and contempt. Governor Aqeel in particular resents the ISF commander's popularity. As security improved, citizens questioned the ISF's continued use of heavy-handed tactics. The business community complains that ISF checkpoints strangle traffic and impede economic progress. Karbala farmers from former Sadrist strongholds al-Husayniyah and al-Hindiyah (whence Maliki hails) often charge the ISF with abuse.

16. (C) Aqeel's discontent with Ra'ad became increasingly apparent. On September 10, the Governor announced that he would shut down 76 ISF checkpoints and 90 police watchtowers, stating that the province could not be held captive to security measures. IP contacts informed the PRT that a special committee arrived from Baghdad to investigate allegations of police brutality. The IP in Karbala claim that the committee was formed at Maliki's request and that it was directed to investigate leadership issues.

17. (C) Comment: The attempt to transfer Ra,ad failed and the order transferring the ISF commander is officially on hold. The order may never be formally revoked, but this is of little consequence. Ra,ad himself has put on a brave face, even suggesting that he orchestrated the transfer order as a way to demonstrate his popularity and silence his critics. Governor Aqeel is the loser in the affair. Not only did Aqeel fail publicly, but he managed to embarrass PM Maliki who was surprised by Ra'ad's broad support. Ra,ad has not emerged unscathed, having been saved by a group of politicians whom he views with contempt. It is uncertain

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whether the ISF commander will retain his existing portfolios, such as Director General of the Police. Both Aqeel and Ra,ad have national ambitions, neither of which are served well by this latest affair. End Comment.
CROCKER